

LABOREMUS

*A PLAY IN
THREE ACTS*

*BJÖRNSTJERNE
BJÖRNSON*



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LABOREMUS



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BY

BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON

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1901

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PREFATORY NOTE

DR. BRANDES has truly said that Björnson and Ibsen must be compared to the two old Norwegian kings, Sigurd and Eystein, who, in the famous legendary conversation appropriated by Björnson in *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, boast to each other of their merits. "The one has stayed at home and civilised his country, the other has left it, wandered far and wide, and gained honour for it on his wild and arduous journeys. Each has his admirers, each his contentious band of followers, who exalt the one at the expense of the other. But they are brothers, although they have for a time been at variance; and the only right thing to happen—and it does happen at the end of the play—is the peaceable division of the kingdom between them." The genius of these two poets has run on parallel lines, if with very different force and velocity, and when the history of Scandinavian literature is

written, the rivalry between them will be the most interesting feature of the Northern literary revival in the nineteenth century. In almost all instances Björnson has been first in the field, and although he is the younger man, he was famous first. Thirty years ago his name was known to a dozen persons where but one had heard of Ibsen. Both began by writing Sagas, but Ibsen emancipated himself earlier from the romantic, and took to the realistic treatment of his subjects a few years before his rival. Yet Björnson dealt first with the problem of marriage—“*De Nygifte*” (“The Newly-married”) foreshadowing Nora Helmer in “*A Doll’s House*;” and in “*En Fallit*” (“A Bankruptcy”) and “*Redaktören*” (“The Editor”) he wrote social dramas which were the forerunners of Ibsen’s “*Pillars of Society*,” and “*The Enemy of Society*.”

The similarity is that of the process of development, of nationality, of contemporaneous activity; there is little in their treatment of the same subjects, none whatever in the spirit of the men themselves. Ibsen is the judge, the stern arbiter, arraigning all known creeds and social conditions, shattering all that he attacks by his scathing criticism, a revolutionary who shows us no new organisation to take the place of the ruins he creates. Björnson, on the

other hand, is the herald of the future, the prophet and the reformer. He deals with no evil for which he does not see a remedy ; there is no bitterness in his warfare. Whilst Ibsen would sweep away the existing conventions of the relations of the sexes as fraught with possibilities of evil, Björnson "cheerfully proposes to modify manners ;" and the point of view is the same in each of the problems with which they have concerned themselves. Ibsen loves the Idea, Björnson loves Mankind. Nor is the contrast in character and temperament less great. Ibsen, solitary, gloomy, a pessimist "far removed," might seem at first more typically Scandinavian than Björnson. But it is not so. The younger dramatist, the sunny optimist, the poet who has ever felt the "daylight of life" to be his element, is the born nationalist. According to Dr. Brandes, to name the name of Björnson is like hoisting the Norwegian flag. "In his merits, his faults, his genius, his weakness, he is as distinctly national as Voltaire and Schiller." The Norwegian poets of the eighteenth century have sufficiently proved that loud light-heartedness and sunny optimism are Norwegian, and Björnson introduces in his characters the taciturnity, the shyness, the sobriety which distinguishes the other half of his people. His early surroundings

gave him a wide experience of these two sides—the grave and the gay—of his nation and land. Born in the valley of the Dovrefjeld, at Kvikne, where his father was pastor, in 1832, the first six years of his life were spent in a district, bleak, bare, surrounded by barren mountains, scarcely populated, and inhabited by a people who could count on but one harvest in five years. When Björnson was six years old his father was moved to Naes, in the valley of the Romsdal, a land of rich variety, full of beautiful scenery and the stir of life, and supporting a people frank, vivacious and capricious. Thus in boyhood was he able to learn and compare. His first essays in literature were songs, which the peasants sang, and by the time that he had devoured the sagas and fairy-tales amidst the scenes of his youth, he “saw the peasant in the light of the sagas, and the sagas in the light of the peasant.” He revivified the saga style, and in “*Synnöve Solbakken*,” “*A Father*,” “*The Eagle’s Nest*,” elevated by its grandeur the idyllic theme of the loves of Norwegian peasants. Popular song and legend were the fountains from which he drew the material for his art. It was because he glorified peasant life that Björnson’s literary fame was quickly established, in spite of his new and strange style to a literary class who formed their

ideal on the philosophic culture of Heiberg and the refinement and charm of Henrik Hertz. The national Liberals in Denmark and the Scandinavians in Norway were still in literature the friends of the peasant, and they took Björnson under their protection. In the peasant they looked to find the sound core of the nation, and works which delicately, poetically, and artistically glorified peasant life and love were welcomed in Denmark, and for the same reason were partially recognised in Norway.

Björnson, nevertheless, early became "a sign to be spoken against." He desired to elevate and raise his people and to be one with them. He wanted to be a reformer in every domain. Dramas and poems followed his peasant romances, and as Director of the Christiania Theatre (1857-1858), he did his best to found a national theatre, and gained valuable experience for his own dramatic writing. Two plays of his first period, "Maria Stuart" (1864), and "Married" (1865), were remarkably successful on the stage, while as an example of his popular style, the ballad of "Nils Finn" may be taken, a ballad which Lobedanz has aptly compared to Gœthe's "Erlköni," and which Dr. Brandes considers undoubtedly stands the comparison. But Björnson at no time considered himself merely a

poet and author. He early accepted a wider vocation. The great idea of his life, the determination to improve, to civilise his country, and to preserve the independence of the two kingdoms of Norway and Sweden, made him willingly do the work of journalist and orator. In 1858, as the editor of the *Bergensposten* newspaper, he vigorously opposed an attempt to knit the two countries together in a closer political union; and in 1859, as editor of a *Christiania* newspaper, he vigorously defended the right of Norway to resist the appointment of a Swedish Statholder. Björnson, since 1858, has been one of the most influential political leaders in Norway, and he is probably the greatest popular orator in Scandinavia. Dr. Brandes has given a graphic little picture of him in "the situation which suits his inmost nature best":—"I see him standing on the platform at a public meeting, tall and broad-shouldered, towering above thousands of Norwegian peasants, swaying the silent multitudes around him by the mighty tones of his voice and his irresistible devotion to the truth, greeted by a storm of jubilant homage the moment his voice ceases." But it was not until Björnson's second period of literary activity, when he had exhausted his original stock of material, and

after a silence of some years, that he represents men and ideas of his day in his work, and brings his politics into his literature. All the best works of his first period were written by the time he was a little over thirty, and in these, like almost all contemporary Scandinavian writers, he kept at a distance from all the thought and life of the day. If he represented them he did it unintentionally, and they appeared dressed in old Norwegian or ancient Scottish costumes. His work of this early period had remarkable qualities, but showed no development. It seemed that it was to be with Björnson as with many Danes, that before he reached the prime of his manhood his voice was to be heard no more, because he could not renew his strength. The North at this period was shut off from the intellectual life of the time, but in the early seventies a great change came.

Scandinavia was stirred by a modern, intellectual, and literary movement, and Björnson, in studying the work of John Stuart Mill, of Darwin, Taine, Max Müller, awoke to a new life, and found new and rich springs welling up in him after his fortieth year. He had got, as he wrote to Dr. Brandes, "eyes that saw, ears that heard." The ideas of the century had come into his poet's mind, and

fecundated it. A burning love of truth sets its mark upon him. He plunges into modern life with the drama "Bankruptcy," and follows in quick succession with "A King"—an attack on the social order of a monarchy—"Magnhild" and "Leonarda" on the relation of natural to conventional morality, "The New System," and "Captain Mansana." It is now that he embodies the best of his nation. He represents its self-criticism. By nature he was a popular spirit, a spiritual representative of the people. He has ever felt himself borne onwards by his country, its history and aims, and in this belief he has spoken, and he has had his whole nation with him and at his back, as have few poets, living or dead.

Since the eighties, politics and social questions have, to a considerable extent, distracted Björnson from the pursuit of literature. He has resided much in Paris and Rome, spending his summers at his estate of Aulestad in a most remote part of Norway, preserving his strong Republican opinions, continuing to agitate against the union of the two kingdoms. He has, however, produced some admirable fiction, two of the more recent novels being "The Heritage of the Kurts," and "In God's Way." His play, "Paul Lange and Tora Parsberg,"

appeared in an English form in 1899. He has not, like Ibsen, produced a new art, nor added new traits to his genius, but the old rivalry in the varied treatment of the same subject has, to a certain extent, remained. The old order is, however, reversed. It is now Björnson who in 1883 treated in "En Hanske" ("A Glove") the sexual problems which Ibsen had attacked in "Ghosts;" and in "The Wild Duck" of Ibsen may, according to Mr. Edmund Gosse, be found the key to Björnson's "Overalvne" ("Alone"). Similarly, shortly after Ibsen depicts Work shattered by Love in his last play, "When we Dead awaken," Björnson makes Work the redemption of the lover in "Laboremus."

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

WISBY.

DR. KANN.

LONGFRID KANN, *Nephew to Dr. Kann.*

LYDIA.

BORGNY, *Daughter to Wisby, known as Miss Auclaire.*

HOTEL SERVANTS, etc.

ACT I.—PASSES IN A GERMAN HOTEL.

ACTS II. AND III.—IN A FRENCH HOTEL.

*** *The first performance of this play took place at Christiania early in May, 1901.*

LABOREMUS

FIRST ACT.

A small, elegantly-furnished drawing-room in a fashionable hotel. Three doors open into it, one at the back and one on either side. Towards the left, and in view of the audience, a sofa with a bride's dress spread out upon it; on a table in front of the sofa, a bridal wreath, a veil, gloves, etc., together with a gentleman's tall hat and gloves; on a chair further back, a light overcoat; near the table, two or three other chairs. It is broad daylight. From the right an Elderly Gentleman enters, partially dressed and wearing a long dressing-gown. He glances round, and, remarking the bridal costume, he approaches it, gazes at it for a short time, and then looks about the room as if missing something. He stops at the door on the left, and, finding it ajar, he peeps in, then opening it he enters, but returns and rings the bell.

FIRST SCENE.

[*A knock is heard at the door.*

WISBY.

Herein !

[*Enter a Man-servant.*]

WISBY.

Ist die gnädige Frau ausgegangen ?

MAN-SERVANT.

Ja, mein Herr.

WISBY.

Ist es lange her ?

MAN-SERVANT.

Ich glaube es ist eine Stunde.

[*WISBY dismisses the Man-servant with a gesture, and, after pacing backwards and forwards two or three times, stops again in front of the bride's dress. He then takes another look into the room on the left, and, at last, sits down on a chair near the table, and abandons himself to his reflections. The door at the back opens, and LYDIA*

enters, wearing an elegant walking costume, and looking bright and fresh. The door closes behind her. On seeing WISBY she hesitates a moment, then softly walks on tiptoe towards him, he being unconscious of her presence until she kneels down beside him. WISBY attempts to rise, but she prevents him.

LYDIA.

Good morning !

WISBY.

[*Cheerily.*] Good morning ! So you have already had a walk this morning ?

LYDIA.

The most beautiful I have ever had in my life.

WISBY.

[*Kissing her.*] What a fragrance of fresh air you bring back with you ! and how lovely you look ! Did you sleep well ?

LYDIA.

Yes ; from the time you left me till it struck nine. Isn't that enough ?

[*She takes off her hat and gloves, and puts them*

on the table with her parasol. Then she picks up the veil and wreath, and handles them fondly, afterwards laying them down again and returning to WISBY, who watches her all the time.

Are you wondering why I went out alone?

WISBY.

No.

LYDIA

It was simply that I felt the need of recognising myself again here, by the small lakes, in the park, amid the beautiful houses in the wealthy suburbs, especially the villas.

WISBY.

Of recognising yourself again?

LYDIA.

I used a wrong word. I mean rather that I wanted to realise the new impression made by appearing again in their midst as their equal.

WISBY.

As their . . . ?

[He pauses.

LYDIA.

The last time I walked about here, I was begging for their patronage. I passed by them in fear, thinking of my concert. I was then only the wonder child. We were giving three concerts here, and if I did not play well, God help me! I think the fears that so often haunt me must have come into my life then.

WISBY.

You think so really.

LYDIA.

The dwellings in the wealthy suburbs, the rich houses; the old trees still more refined than the houses, the tiny lakes, these things were realities to me. Moreover, I was a wanderer, and I glanced humbly at them, full of fear. But to-day! I have been walking for two whole hours in their midst, two hours in triumph. I passed by them; it was a grand sight. I knew all of them, and they recognised me. *[She throws herself at his feet.]* Oh, how grateful I am to you!

WISBY.

My beautiful one!

[He strokes her hair.]

LYDIA.

I seemed not to know who I really was until this morning. I have asked myself again and again in my inmost being.

WISBY.

You also?

LYDIA.

What? [*She springs to her feet.*] Are there others who feel the same? [*WISBY nods affirmatively.*] Is it so really? To-day, yes, to-day I know who I am. To-day others know it also. I saw it; I saw that the villas, the old trees, and the lakes knew it too. Afar off, when they caught the first glimpse of me, they made ready, came forth to meet me, and greeted me.

WISBY.

[*Smiling.*] And the people.

LYDIA.

I am not speaking of the people. Oh, when I was perched up on the platform and played, and could never be alone! Oh, how I suffered! How I wanted to be alone! . . . To have something that should be mine exclusively would have been paradise

to me! The people, you say. Yes, if I could pick out a single person, take this one into a corner apart, and whisper with him. . . .

Oh, those eyes! "Who is she?" "I wonder whence she is?" "What is it she wants with us?" . . .

As soon as I was free, I rushed into the country, away to the trees and the tiny lakes. I made them my confidants; but they looked at me proudly, and I was obliged to keep at a distance. Yet I was able to tell them: "I want to be as you are, as safe and secure as you are." And now I am! [*leaning over him*]. You, my friend, did not go about inquiring from other people concerning me. You came straight from your home, from your farm, and asked me: "Will you be my wife?" This was how it should be. No one in the world, except you and me, had any idea that this would happen. It was destined to be; and now my joy is complete.

WISBY.

Thank you.

LYDIA.

[*Walking a little away.*] Can any one else know what it is, in the inmost soul, which draws two

people together? Do we know it ourselves? Do we thoroughly know why we are as we are? Does any one of us remember what we were two years ago? When some one comes and tells me what I did then, or what I said, it is just as if I read it in a book. I am no longer the woman I was two years ago, not to speak of five or ten years since. The girl I was then is, in truth, more of a stranger to me than you are now.

WISBY.

You are quite right.

LYDIA.

You feel that, too, don't you? [WISBY *nods affirmatively.*] But then no one wants us to conform to this past to-day. We are something more than a continuation of ourselves. The new that comes to us is for ever changing us.

WISBY.

Certainly!

LYDIA.

The fact of our having found each other, and being now one, has added so much that is new to our lives, and this has permeated everything, so that we have

become other people, and must act otherwise than we did.

WISBY.

Can any one doubt this?

LYDIA.

No! But we must have the courage so to act
[She kneels down beside him.] Since yesterday evening there remain only you and I; only you and I [tenderly]. Let nothing of the old come between us.

WISBY.

[Warmly.] Never, I have promised you! Again I say to you, Never.

LYDIA.

Otherwise I should not have dared. . . . The mental life you have left behind you. . . . I will repay you.

WISBY.

You have already done so! . . . [She rises.] Every word you speak makes me very happy.

[He also rises.]

LYDIA.

You are the most modest, the noblest of men. It

is why I tell you all this. When I woke up this morning—you know, I slept all night from the moment you left me.

WISBY.

That is youth ! You told me so.

LYDIA.

I slept till nine o'clock. I sprang up—I had scarcely time to dress and get out and enjoy the lovely weather, the villas, the park, the lakes. To get out into the sunshine. To have a talk !

WISBY.

A talk ?

LYDIA.

Not with the people ! No, with the houses. . . . Ah ! I have told you this before. Oh, how I long, too, for Paris ! But there we shall drive ?

WISBY.

We will have horses. I am fond of horses.

LYDIA.

Grey ones ! and the livery light grey also, and then

you will drive yourself. You are so stately. No one knows it better than I. You will drive with me in all the places where I before . . . Oh, how happy I am ! [She leans on his shoulder, while he takes her hand and strokes it.] We will keep the people at a distance.

WISBY.

Yes !

LYDIA.

We will look at them from our box at the Opera, the theatre, the races.

WISBY.

There . . . yes !

LYDIA.

But we must give a few musical evenings during the winter, very exclusive ones, only a few. The rest of the time we will be alone.

WISBY.

Alone ! I love it.

LYDIA.

[Trying to make him sit down.] Do not think I will

take advantage of you. I know your wishes, and they shall be mine. [He sits down.]

WISBY.

Dearest !

LYDIA.

[Walking away from him.] Ah ! there is something I often remember of my home-life. On the other side of the river there was a cooper's workshop, where staves lay that were taken and put together and hooped. Oh, that feeling of being only staves, unable to arrange one's own destiny !

WISBY.

[Rising.] Lydia, my friend, you may trust me.

LYDIA.

[Returning to his side.] Ah ! it is glorious, what you have given me and said to me ; but perhaps the most glorious is that you can receive all I have to give ! all I want to give *you* ! Most people cannot do this ; they can only receive small things. But I give myself to you, body and soul. As a child I used to play at hide-and-seek in a valley deep in the forest. I fancied I was the only one who was acquainted with the spot and owned it. The sun and I. This

valley I will give to you. No, sit down! Yes, you must sit down again! I want you to! That's right! And then I am here. [*She kneels down at his side.*] I am young, and will warm you with my youth. Though in mid-winter, your table shall be served as if it were summer. You have sometimes told me that you grew weary of your own thoughts. This won't be so any more. I will play for you. You like music.

WISBY.

[*Sadly.*] I love music.

LYDIA.

I was reading lately about a rose-bush that looked through a window at an invalid. You are not an invalid, and I am not a rose-bush; but you prefer people somewhat at a distance, even when they wish to do you good. That is how I want to be. I know your nature.

WISBY.

How good you are! Ah, how good you are!

LYDIA.

You speak so sadly. . . . [*looks at him with a startled air.*] Are you not well?

WISBY.

I am only a little tired.

LYDIA.

You have not slept well.

WISBY.

No.

LYDIA.

Why . . . ? Heavens, you have not . . .

WISBY.

Dearest ! It is something else.

LYDIA.

Something has happened ? Last night ? It cannot be ! Have you had a letter ?

WISBY.

No, no ! Nothing of that kind ! It is really nothing.

LYDIA.

And yet you were so happy yesterday when you left me.

WISBY.

I am happy, I assure you.

LYDIA.

I shall feel easier when you have told me what it is.

WISBY.

I would, if there were anything, but there is not.

LYDIA.

You have been thinking of . . . ? Of what ?

WISBY.

Don't ask me any more, there's a good girl.

LYDIA.

Ah ! now I know. You have dreamt. [WISBY looks at her for a time, and then nods affirmatively.] And the dream was a sad one ?

WISBY.

Perhaps it was not a dream.

LYDIA.

Was it not . . . ? No; now you must tell me more !

WISBY.

I can tell you nothing, for it was nothing. Let us speak no more about it, then it will not exist.

LYDIA.

And I was so happy, and did not notice that you were sad.

WISBY.

[*Rising.*] No, no, I assure you. We said the first day, and we have repeated to-day, that the past is nothing to us. It *shall* be nothing.

LYDIA.

Then it was something from the past ; like a visit ?

WISBY.

In a dream—or something of that sort. Yes, it was foolish to let it rob me of my sleep. But more than that it shall not be able to do. I tell you . . . I tell you . . . Ghosts must be laid. They must be driven back into the night. For now it is day, a new day ! I will go and dress ; then we will lunch and take a drive. The weather is so splendid.

LYDIA.

Yes, the weather is splendid, but the shadow that has fallen on you is also over me.

WISBY.

Lydia . . . ! Rather help me; it is as if I had been pulled down into a tomb.

LYDIA.

A tomb? You have fallen so deep! And when you ask me for help to rise, should I not be anxious?

WISBY.

Any word further about this . . .

[He walks towards the back of the room; when he returns LYDIA meets him.]

LYDIA.

Last night you had a visit from your dead wife. *[WISBY, in terror-stricken silence, stops his walk; LYDIA herself is terror-stricken.]* In a dream, or . . . ?

WISBY.

I do not know.

LYDIA.

What did she want? . . . What did she want . . . with you?

WISBY.

I had just come back from you, and was about to lie down when . . . she stood there!

LYDIA.

[*After a pause.*] Did she speak?

WISBY.

[*Putting out his hand.*] Let us say no more about it. I ought not to have spoken.

LYDIA.

Perhaps. But now you must go on.

WISBY.

I cannot go on.

LYDIA.

Then I will. She said something you dare not repeat.

WISBY.

[*In despair.*] This is not for the day. Let it rest.

LYDIA.

For it to stay in your soul, the inmost recesses of your being !

WISBY.

I thrust it from me *thus*.

[He passes one hand with a rapid movement several times over the other, then with the hands reversed repeats the same movement several times, laying emphasis on "thus."]

LYDIA.

But you cannot do this for me. In the future it will be impossible for me to see you without saying to myself, "What can she have told him ?"

WISBY.

But that will be a sin ! A dream, if not repeated, fades away gradually, and becomes at last nothing. But if it is recalled . . .

[He pauses, turns away, and walks a few paces.]

LYDIA.

[Following him.] And if it is recalled ?

WISBY.

[Facing her.] Then, as you must know, life is

given to it, and it grows. Let me tell you, sensible people do not take dreams and ghosts into their lives. . . . We will leave this place to-night.

LYDIA.

Are you sure some one will not go with us?

WISBY.

Some one . . . with . . . ?

LYDIA.

Will not sit down between us, speak with us?

WISBY

But, Lydia!

LYDIA.

It will be so; I know it. I shall see her behind you!

WISBY.

Lydia! how can you?

LYDIA.

She will send me out of the house. Who can sleep where you are sleeping while she is hovering round you?

WISBY.

But if I tell you . . .

LYDIA.

Then we shall be two to face it. . . . Then we can walk hand in hand up to it . . . whatever it is and whensoever it comes.

WISBY.

[*Reflecting.*] Well ! [*Suddenly*] No ! I will not say it.

LYDIA.

[*In a low tone.*] Then it was something about me.

[WISBY does not answer. LYDIA grows pale and rigid. WISBY remarks it. They stare at each other.

LYDIA.

Now you must go and dress.

[WISBY leaves the room through the door on the right. LYDIA stands for a while motionless. She looks towards the left, where the bride's dress is lying on the sofa, walks up to it, picks it up and throws it on the floor ; then taking the veil and gloves, she flings

them on the top of the dress, and tramples on all the bridal attire ; the bridal wreath she afterwards tears up and scatters over the things she has crushed with her feet. When this is done, she sinks into a chair beside the table, places her arms on the table, lets her head fall on to her arms, and bursts into passionate sobs. WISBY, who has left the door ajar through which he quitted the room, returns, and stands in the centre of the stage. He has taken off his dressing-gown.

CURTAIN.

SECOND ACT.

A large, richly-furnished drawing-room. A door at the back and another on the spectators' right, near the front. On the right a grand piano. Further back, away from the wall, a couch. On the left, a large, old-fashioned, elegantly-carved cupboard. Nearer the front, a sofa, table, and chairs.

FIRST SCENE.

[Enter WISBY with a visitor's card in his hand, and followed by a hotel servant.]

SERVANT.

Oui, Monsieur.

WISBY.

Madame est-elle levée ?

SERVANT.

Je ne crois pas, Monsieur. Je vais demander.

WISBY.

Faites entrer Monsieur.

SERVANT.

Oui, Monsieur. [Exit, closing the door.

[WISBY goes to the cupboard and opens it, disclosing a row of decanters and glasses. He takes a decanter, and, pouring some of its contents into a glass, he empties it twice with hurried draughts, then he shuts the cupboard.

[The hotel servant opens the room door. A head waiter is seen passing rapidly with a list in his hand and calling out, "Quarante-deux, trois et quatre." A travelling party go by, a gentleman calls out, "Not too far, please." An elderly lady adds, "On the sunny side, please." When these have disappeared, there enters from the right DR. KANN, with a large case under his arm. The hotel servant closes the door.

[WISBY goes up to him and holds out his hand, which DR. KANN grasps. For a moment they do not speak. DR. KANN casts a long, searching glance at WISBY, who visibly

shrinks from it. DR. KANN puts down the case.

WISBY.

Have you come from Norway?

DR. KANN.

Through England.

WISBY.

Won't you sit down?

[They sit down.

DR. KANN.

[Looking about him.] You are living in great style here. Have you been here the whole time?

[The following replies are given hesitatingly and with pauses.

WISBY.

During the summer we travel.

DR. KANN.

I heard you were in Switzerland. . . .

WISBY.

[Leaning back with folded arms.] Is it long since you left Norway?

DR. KANN.

About a week.

WISBY.

It was still mid-winter there, I suppose?

DR. KANN.

Yes, it was quite winter. And one enjoys the spring.

WISBY.

How long do you intend to stay here?

DR. KANN.

It depends. I am not here on my own account.

WISBY.

[Sharply.] I expected you.

DR. KANN.

He is young. And it is better to sow one's wild oats while one is young.

WISBY.

He has been away for a month. But last night he returned [astonished]. You know it?

DR. KANN.

I have just left him.

WISBY.

Really !

DR. KANN.

I am staying in this hotel, in the room next his.

WISBY.

Indeed !

[Rises, goes to the door on the right, and tries if it is closed.]

DR. KANN.

Is any one there ?

WISBY.

I don't think so *[sits down]*. But this suite of rooms belongs to us.

DR. KANN.

You are giving musical evenings here . . . ?

WISBY.

Yes.

DR. KANN.

Does she play as well as ever ?

WISBY.

Better than ever, I tell you—— !

[Stops, leans forward, then suddenly throws himself back in his chair, folding his arms again, and looking straight before him.]

DR. KANN.

It was at one of these they met ?

WISBY.

[In the same position.] Here.

DR. KANN.

She has been playing his Rondo for him ?

WISBY.

[Turning to DR. KANN.] You should have been there *[resuming his former position].*

DR. KANN.

It was not long ago ? A few months, I suppose ?

WISBY.

Yes, about that—about that [*turning to DR. KANN.*] Are you going to take him home ?

DR. KANN.

I have no authority over him.

WISBY.

Indeed ! His uncle and guardian ?

DR. KANN.

Even if I had, I should not interfere.

WISBY.

[*Springing to his feet.*] You would not interfere ? You would not interfere ?

DR. KANN.

Not for him to know it.

WISBY.

Oh !

[*He sits down again.*

DR. KANN.

But you . . . Wisby ?

WISBY.

[*Hesitatingly.*] I?

DR. KANN.

Why don't you go home? That would be the best solution.

[WISBY bends forward, with both hands on his knees, as if decided to speak, and then leans back again.

DR. KANN.

Just before I started, I visited your estate. [WISBY does not answer.] When I arrived the dogs were mad with joy.

They certainly supposed you, too, were not far away. [WISBY moves uneasily.] Do you not sometimes hear them bark? Don't you see the sun on the mountain-tops in your splendid and beautiful forest? Don't you hear the clear-toned baying of Diana?

WISBY.

How . . . how are the dogs?

DR. KANN.

Ah! that is the worst, or rather the only thing I had to find fault with. Diana has grown fat like the others, and the horses were altogether too fat.

WISBY.

[*Rising in a passion.*] That lazy Ole. Idle dog ! Didn't I tell him and write to him not to let the dogs grow fat ? I have written again and again that he was to exercise the horses every day. I'll send him away. I won't stand it. I tell you, I tell you, I have no one I can trust.

DR. KANN.

Then you are thinking of going home ?

[WISBY does not answer.]

DR. KANN.

You don't ask me why I went out to the estate.

WISBY.

[*After an anxious pause.*] Is any one ill there ?

DR. KANN.

No ! Everybody is in good health. . . . I thought that as I had to come here, I ought to bring you something.

WISBY.

Me ?

DR. KANN.

[*Rising.*] I went into your study, and I have

brought you this. [Goes towards the case.] I had a nice case made for it. [He takes up the case, puts it on the table, and fixes it upright by a support at the back.] I thought it might perhaps give you pleasure to see her again.

WISBY.

It is surely not . . . ?

DR. KANN.

Yes, it is . . . it is herself.

[He opens the case, in which is seen the life-size portrait of a Lady. The head is noble and of great beauty. Of the bust only the shoulders are visible, draped in a black silk dress with a broad lace collar. The whole painting strikingly resembles a portrait by Van Dyck.

WISBY.

Amelia!

[He approaches it slowly, as if in awe, and falls on his knees. A silence. When he rises again he takes his pocket-handkerchief and carefully wipes the portrait, more particularly in one place.

DR. KANN.

I do not think it is dusty, but perhaps it needs varnishing.

WISBY.

Yes.

[*He abandons the portrait reluctantly, bursts into tears, and sits down.*

DR. KANN.

And your daughter, Wisby?

WISBY.

I have no daughter. [*Bursts into tears again.*

DR. KANN.

What do you mean?

WISBY.

She is so far away. . . . And she does not answer my letters.

DR. KANN.

Have you written to her?

WISBY.

One letter after another.

DR. KANN.

Then I am sure she has replied.

WISBY.

[*In a low, startled voice.*] What!

DR. KANN.

She has written again and again. And she says, as you, without ever receiving an answer.

WISBY.

[*Rises, and, glancing to the left, takes a few steps in the same direction, then returns.*] Is it . . . can it be possible? [Dr. KANN keeps silence.]

WISBY.

[*Walking about the room, and then returning to DR. KANN.*] Will you . . . will you answer me frankly? It is . . . it is painful for me to say it . . . but I have no one whom I could ask, and write I will not. [*He glances round before he adds*] Who is . . . [*He looks towards the right-hand door before he says with an effort*] Who is . . . who is she? [As DR. KANN does not answer immediately, he continues] I am afraid every one knows it . . . but I,

DR. KANN.

That is possible.

WISBY.

[*With suppressed bitterness and passion.*] And no one told me anything ! not even you !

DR. KANN.

There was no time. No one had any idea of what you proposed to do.

WISBY.

That may be. That may be. But still, no one told me anything. She had been visiting us.

DR. KANN.

Yes. . . . But when you left so suddenly, we all thought it was to bring your daughter home again. The risk of infection was past. Instead of this, you turn up in Paris, married.

WISBY.

Let us speak no more about that ! . . . What do people say of it all . . . Do not spare me ! What do they say ?

DR. KANN.

Let us sit down.

WISBY.

Yes . . . but why?

DR. KANN.

I am going to tell you something, but it will take time.

[*They sit down.*

WISBY.

[*Rising again.*] A moment, please. [*Goes and closes the case, then returns, and sits down.*] Now !

DR. KANN.

It happened several years ago at a watering-place in Norway. One day, in the middle of the season, there arrived a beautiful young lady, supremely elegant ; she was a celebrated pianist.

WISBY.

Ah ! indeed.

DR. KANN.

By a singular accident she had become lame.

WISBY.

Who had become lame?

DR. KANN.

Yes! She could hardly move her feet. She had to be ~~lifted~~, carried, and wheeled about in an invalid-chair.

WISBY.

You astonish me . . . !

DR. KANN.

. . . Wait a little! You may imagine that the gentlemen were only too happy to do all this for her.

WISBY.

But . . . ! She has never spoken about this.

DR. KANN.

They carried her to the table and back, to the piano and back. They put her into her invalid chair and lifted her out of it. And in order to be permitted to push it . . . well . . . I will not assert that they fought about the matter, though Norwegians will fight for less, but it was all she could do to hinder them. She would allow no

scandal ; was very modest and reserved ; and gave absolutely no preference to any one ; so that all had hopes.

Each thought to gain her good graces by serving her. But after a while the tension became too strong. . . . Factions were formed. Old men made themselves ridiculous for her sake. . . . Married couples wanted to be divorced. . . . Ladies left the watering-place.

Then something happened.

WISBY.

[*Wiping the perspiration from his forehead.*] Well ?

DR. KANN.

The youngest doctor of the place, who was the farthest gone of them all, had to give up his room to a patient, and received in exchange, perhaps not altogether by accident, a room next to hers on the ground floor. Naturally he could not sleep ; he lay and listened, if she stirred, or coughed, or sighed, or . . . at last, in the middle of the night, he heard her get up . . . and walk.

WISBY.

She walked ?

DR. KANN.

Why, of course ! For a whole hour, to and fro, for a whole hour. The following night . . . she danced. For the woman was as sound as a bell ; she needed exercise ! The third night he did not hear anything ; she had left, quietly. He had given her a hint.

WISBY.

Well ! I have never heard of such a thing in my life . . . !

DR. KANN.

He was so annoyed and ashamed that he never spoke about it till you married her. Then he spoke.

[WISBY *rises, and strides up and down.*

DR. KANN.

It is quite an amusing story !

WISBY.

[*Laughs . . . a strange laugh, and comes back.*] Is there more ? There is more, of course ?

DR. KANN.

Something about old Stephansen.

WISBY.

Stephansen of . . . ?

DR. KANN.

Yes ! the old Croesus—to be sure.

WISBY.

Isn't he dead ?

DR. KANN.

Yes, he is dead now. But he lived on for a long while, this fellow. She obtained a life-annuity from him.

WISBY.

From him ? It comes from him ? She says . . .
[*Restraints himself, and sits down again.*] Well, what about him ?

DR. KANN.

The old man was seventy years old or more when he was so violently taken with her that he followed her all over Europe. He always stayed in the same hotel where she was. . . . That lasted for years. He wanted absolutely to marry her ; but his relations interfered, as might be expected ; they did not want

to lose their money. So he was obliged to give it up. The old man was never the same after.

WISBY.

[*After a silence.*] So the life-annuity dates from old Stephansen . . . ! Is there anything else ?

DR. KANN.

I don't know all . . . but I read a few years ago of a young English officer who shot himself in a hotel in Amsterdam ; outside the door of a celebrated lady pianist, as was reported. It made a great stir. All the papers mentioned it.

WISBY.

That . . . that was when my wife was still living. We read it together . . . I think. Yes. . . . Could it be she ?

DR. KANN.

No name was given, or rather the initials only were published. But I have every reason for believing she was the one.

WISBY.

Before the door . . . not inside.

DR. KANN.

[*With a wondering glance.*] But, Wisby . . . ?

WISBY.

[*Rising.*] Let me alone !

[*Goes to the back of the room.*]

DR. KANN.

[*Looking after him.*] The officer had no fortune.

WISBY.

[*Stopping suddenly, and coming back towards him.*]
Do you think I can ever come home ?

DR. KANN.

Alone ? Yes. [*Rises.*] To speak plainly : Is this to go on ?

WISBY.

[*Walks away from him a prey to great excitement ; returns, tries ineffectually to say something, and walks away again. At last he says*] When she left us it was on a bleak, cold, winter's day without snow. My wife was in the house in bed ; she had become very ill again. Outside, the other one was stepping into the carriage, she who had given us the music

... and hope. It was as if life were leaving us. I asked her to stay, but she would not. Then . . .

DR. KANN.

Excuse my interrupting you, but she did not leave voluntarily.

WISBY.

What do you say ?

DR. KANN.

I say she did not go away of her own free will.

WISBY.

How so? . . . You . . . ?

DR. KANN.

Yes, I ! I compelled her to leave the house.

WISBY.

[*Anxiously.*] Why ?

DR. KANN.

She was killing the one in the house !

WISBY.

Killing her ?

DR. KANN.

Not with a dagger, or poison, or by strangulation, but with her eyes, with her will. She wanted to have your wife's place.

WISBY.

My God !

DR. KANN.

The patient felt it ; and that was quite sufficient. What did she not feel ?

WISBY.

What . . . what did she feel ? More . . . ?

DR. KANN.

You divine what I am going to say.

WISBY.

As sure as there is a God, I did not then understand. As sure as there is a God, not by a single word, not by the least sign did I injure my poor wife.

DR. KANN.

No . . . No ! That was not necessary. She felt what you thought. And . . . that was sufficient.

Without that thought of yours the other would not have conquered.

[WISBY looks at him, and sinks into the nearest chair.

DR. KANN.

It cannot be said that she was obliged to die in any case. If I had not believed she might live, that she was getting better, should I have gone away and left her to be attended by another doctor? No. When I came back home, the worst had happened, and it was too late.

[WISBY springs up, and walks about; thinks of the cupboard, goes up and opens it . . . but recollecting that the doctor is present, he shuts it violently, and, returning hurriedly to his chair, sits down in a paroxysm of grief.

Why did you not tell me?

DR. KANN.

I wanted to spare you. Can't you understand that, man?

WISBY.

Spare me! If you had spoken then you might have spared me this.

DR. KANN.

You were in such despair, I thought you guessed it yourself.

WISBY.

No, no, no !

DR. KANN.

When did the first doubt occur to you ?

WISBY.

[*Rising as if in a kind of ecstasy.*] I tell you, I tell you, she came in the same form as when she was alive—in her black dress with lace collar.

DR. KANN.

[*In a hushed voice.*] Amelia, your dead . . . ?

WISBY.

On the wedding night. I was sitting in my bed ; at least, it seemed to me just as if I were sitting wide-awake in my bed, when she came, looked so mournfully at me, and said : She whom you left just now has taken my life.

DR. KANN.

[*In the same voice.*] She said that . . . ?

WISBY.

And since, ah ! since then everything has been black despair ; and I have thought of nothing else. [Walks away from him, and comes back again.] But, if I am her accomplice . . . well, then, then . . .

DR. KANN.

This cannot go on.

WISBY.

It must ! That is just why it must !

DR. KANN.

There is some one who can help you.

WISBY.

Me ? Help me ? Do you think I want to be helped ? Do you think I want to forgive myself ? There is a proverb that tells us, "What a man sows, that shall he reap." But I tell you we reap thus, because we have not sown. Weeds are our harvest ! I have done nothing all my life. This has called forth unhealthy instincts. And these have . . .

DR. KANN.

[Interrupting him.] Things cannot go on in this

way. There is some one who is able to bestow forgiveness. She can bestow it on you, day after day, in your own home.

WISBY.

Borgny! I dare not see her again, after this day, after what I now know.

DR. KANN.

But she dares . . . and that is the essential point. She will take you in her arms. And that is why I brought this with me. [Goes towards the portrait.

WISBY.

Yes, open it again for a moment.

DR. KANN.

[Opens it.] The mother and daughter are as like each other as two . . .

WISBY.

[Whose eyes are fixed on the portrait, and does not hear him, says at the same time] Ah! forgive me, I say; forgive me!

DR. KANN.

Won't you keep it, Wisby?

WISBY.

[*Anxiously.*] No, no ! Take it with you. [He goes mechanically to the door on the right, and says to himself] It is open ! Now it is no longer open ! . . . But it was !

DR. KANN.

The door has been open for a long time.

WISBY.

Indeed ! But when I tried it . . .

DR. KANN.

[*Standing by the portrait.*] Then you don't wish to keep it ?

WISBY.

No ! take it with you.

DR. KANN.

[*Closes the case quickly, takes it up, and afterwards his hat.*] Then I am going. Good-bye.

[WISBY goes again mechanically to the door on the right. Turning round, he sees that DR. KANN is gone ; and noticing that DR. KANN has left the door open, he attempts

to close it ; but outside the door stands a lady whose face and dress are exactly like those of the portrait. Staggering back, he calls loudly :

Lydia ! Lydia !

[LYDIA hastens in from the right, clad in an elegant dressing-gown, with her hair down her back. She sees the same form as her husband, and runs to him. They both stand terror-stricken side by side. The lady outside, who seemed about to enter, passes on.

WISBY.

This . . . this is the second time ! There can be no doubt now !

LYDIA.

[*Distractedly.*] What is it ?

WISBY.

[*With indignation.*] Does not your conscience tell you ?

LYDIA.

[*Recovering herself.*] My conscience ? . . . Go and shut the door.

WISBY.

I dare not.

LYDIA.

Then I will.

[She goes quickly towards the spot, but, when there, her courage fails, and she retreats slowly, with her face to the door. At the same moment the door is closed from the outside.]

WISBY.

[Going up to her.] What did you see?

LYDIA.

Nothing; there is nothing, absolutely nothing.
You must be intoxicated.

WISBY.

I am . . . what?

LYDIA.

This is Dr. Kann's doing.

WISBY.

Dr. Kann's? . . . But, Lydia!

LYDIA.

I have heard every word you have said to each other.

WISBY.

You have?

LYDIA.

You have delivered me over to my enemies! You have betrayed me. You, who said we should begin a new life, and that nothing should exist of what had been either for you or for me. This was what you promised, and you broke your promise the first morning; you have broken it ever since! . . . ever since! Have you not yet done torturing me?

WISBY.

Lydia!

LYDIA.

[Stamping her foot.] Have I not yet heard all? Isn't it finished?

WISBY.

[With dignity.] I will leave you; but I tell you, . . . I tell you. . . . ! [Exit.]

LYDIA.

[Calling after him.] And I tell you. . . . I tell

you. . . . You are a wretch. . . . You have villainously slandered me, villainously, villainously.

[*She turns away and walks about in a rage, but proud of her victory. In his excitement, WISBY has forgotten to close the door, so that it is open again. Outside, some one hums an air. A light-complexioned young man stops on the threshold.*]

SECOND SCENE.

LONGFRID.

Are you here?

[*He enters, and closes the door behind him. Then he approaches her slowly, enjoying the situation.*]

[*At the first note LYDIA stands still and listens. She puts both her hands to her breast, neither stirring nor turning towards him.*]

LONGFRID.

[*Stops behind her, and whispers into her ear.*] Thank you for last night. . . . [*He slips his arm under hers.*]

[*LYDIA, turning round, throws herself into his arms, and hides her head on his shoulder.*]

LONGFRID.

Lydia ! [LYDIA *bursts into tears.*] What is the matter ?

LYDIA.

Don't let me go, Longfrid ! Hide me !

LONGFRID.

What is it, my darling ? [LYDIA *does not answer, but her convulsive movements show that she is weeping.*] Disagreeables on account of me ? [She still does not answer.] Has any one been saying something to you ? [LYDIA *raises her hand.*] Do you know my uncle is here ?

LYDIA.

[*Passionately.*] Let no more part us, Longfrid.

LONGFRID.

[*Quickly.*] Has he said something ? [She does not answer.] Has he spoken to you ? [LYDIA *shakes her head.*] We were talking about you to-day for a long time.

LYDIA.

[*Raises her head quickly, and, half-withdrawing from him, looks into his face.*] What did he say ?

LONGFRID.

He knew you. I was not aware of that.

LYDIA.

What did he say ?

LONGFRID.

Nothing that was not good.

LYDIA.

[*Reflects, and then replies*] Oh, he is so clever !

LONGFRID.

Why do you say that in such a way ?

LYDIA.

Because you are not clever. Oh, don't let him separate us, Longfrid !

LONGFRID.

My uncle? Why should you imagine such a thing ?

LYDIA.

No one in the whole world can be to you what I am. . . . You have told me so yourself. Say it again. . . . Tell it me.

LONGFRID.

No one in the whole world !

LYDIA.

For no one loves you as I do. No one *can* love you as I ; for no one understands your music and yourself as I do. . . . You said so yourself, did you not ? You told me so.

LONGFRID.

[*Kissing her passionately.*] Is that a sufficient answer ?

LYDIA.

It never can be sufficient. . . . Oh, as I cling to you now, so will I be in all your thoughts ! Where we have our work, there is also our love. Those were your words. Do you remember what you said about healthy men choosing their work and their wife from the same instinct ? You told me that.

LONGFRID.

Perhaps I did.

LYDIA.

You did, you did. Nothing ever made me so proud. Me, who was in love with your Rondo long

before I saw you. Is not that a sign? And I was sitting playing it when you entered, the first time, unexpectedly. That must mean something. It was destiny, was it not?

LONGFRID.

No one ever played my Rondo as you did then.

LYDIA.

Another sign. It could not have been mere chance.

LONGFRID.

That I don't know. But I know one thing; from that moment we two could not live apart.

LYDIA.

Another sign! Another sign! And the Rondo has grown, and has become an Opera.

LONGFRID.

No, it was that already.

LYDIA.

Indeed! . . . ?

LONGFRID.

Don't you remember? It was the first time we

spoke of it. Out of the Rondo should come an Opera, and deliver the great yearning of Nature that lives in Fairy Tale !

LYDIA.

Yes, perhaps [*coaxingly.*] It is the Opera we will live for now.

LONGFRID.

[*Warmly.*] Of course !

LYDIA.

But let no one part us !

LONGFRID.

[*Looking wonderingly at her.*] What do you mean ?

LYDIA.

I see danger before us. I know it for certain . . . that is, I feel it. I always feel anything of this kind beforehand. Longfrid, let us go away !

LONGFRID.

Now ?

LYDIA.

This very night ! I don't know, but I feel we must ! Oh, let us go away, I beseech you !

LONGFRID.

But then I must tell my uncle.

LYDIA.

No, no, no ! It is just he . . . !

LONGFRID.

Who wants to separate us ?

LYDIA.

That is why he is here.

LONGFRID.

My uncle ?

LYDIA.

Yes, I feel it all. I am sure of it.

LONGFRID.

But he told me quite the opposite ! . . . On my honour !

LYDIA.

What did he say ?

LONGFRID.

That he very well understood we must love each other.

LYDIA.

That sounds rather ambiguous, Longfrid.

LONGFRID.

My uncle is truth and sincerity itself.

LYDIA.

Have I said anything to the contrary?

LONGFRID.

He has been my best friend ever since my father died. He says all that he has to say to me quite frankly.

LYDIA.

I don't doubt it.

LONGFRID.

Ah! can't we have some music? I am hungering for music. That is why I came. I have not yet heard you play.

LYDIA.

To do so, I should want to be in the humour.

LONGFRID.

And are you not? Oh, what a pity!

LYDIA.

You can understand that the first time I am to play for you again, I ought to be just in the humour.

LONGFRID.

. . . Then let us speak of music. Ah, yes! All this month I have had no one. Let us sit down. We have not yet talked together. For yesterday evening . . .

LYDIA.

Hush! hush!

LONGFRID.

I will be silent about last night. It is too beautiful to speak about.

LYDIA.

We will sit down, then.

LONGFRID.

As we used to! You there [*pointing to the couch*], and I at your side. [*LYDIA allows him to take her to the couch.*] Ah, how long it is since we met thus!

[*He places her on the couch; she arranges herself with one arm under her head and the other resting at her side. He drapes*

her dress at her feet, rises, and looks at her.]

Like a wave! I once saw a wave in a picture. A single one. It came towards us . . .

LYDIA.

[*Laughing.*] . . . To engulf us?

LONGFRID.

Yes, to draw us in!

LYDIA.

The Undine! Always the Undine!

LONGFRID.

[*Taking a chair.*] What else should I think of?

[*He sits down.*

LYDIA.

I had an experience while you were away.

LONGFRID.

An experience?

LYDIA.

It is perhaps not the right word. Let us say a vision.

LONGFRID.

Do you go in for visions now?

LYDIA.

Is that naughty too! I will tell you how it was.

I saw some snow-crystals in the sun-lit air.

LONGFRID.

Was it snowing in the sun-lit air?

LYDIA.

It was not snow; . . . they were snow-crystals, the finest, the very finest snow-crystals. They fell in a shower through the air.

LONGFRID.

[*Eagerly.*] . . . Through the sun-lit air.

LYDIA.

Through the sun-lit air! I never saw anything so pure and sparkling. They glittered in the air, in the sun, millions of them, and fell without noise.

LONGFRID.

How could this be put into music? For it gives music, does it not?

LYDIA.

Guess what I made of it.

LONGFRID.

Oh ! a seraph-choir ! Far away, invisible ?

LYDIA.

No ! I was nearer. Nearer here. I thought of you and me.

LONGFRID.

What do you mean ?

LYDIA.

If you could have everything as you wished it, then I should be scattered as atoms through all your music. I should glitter in it like snow-crystals and make it finer. Do you understand ?

LONGFRID.

I' faith, no !

LYDIA.

[*Rising.*] You love me only in your music.

LONGFRID.

Spiritually ?

LYDIA.

Tut ! Tut ! At present, I am Undine. You see in me only your Undine.

LONGFRID.

Well, what then ?

LYDIA.

[*Eagerly.*] What then ? I am not satisfied with that ! I love you !

LONGFRID.

I cannot see the difference.

LYDIA.

You cannot ? [*lying back again.*] Tush ! Just listen . . . !

LONGFRID.

You imagine, perhaps, that you love me without my music ?

LYDIA.

Yes ! Yes ! I tell you !

LONGFRID.

Without that you would never have known me at all. I should have been quite a different person.

LYDIA.

But I wish to be more to you than Undine ! You
arouse my fears.

LONGFRID.

Really ? What do you think the Undine is to me ?

LYDIA.

The subject of an Opera ! A series of motives,
a theme of inspiration ! Inexhaustible, perhaps ;
but in it are neither you nor I.

LONGFRID.

Oh yes, we are, as surely as our nature is in it.
The deuce ! it is nature who has chosen, and chosen
just this !

Later, perhaps, we may make another choice, and
meet again in that . . . perhaps ! . . . but we are
now here ! It is thus that our nature is delivered,
thus that it enlarges itself. That is granted, isn't it ?

LYDIA.

[*In a low tone.*] Perhaps. . . . Partially.

LONGFRID.

What is the Undine but the ocean itself ? A

poem of the ocean? The ocean, that yearns for the land.

Restlessness surrounding that which is stable. Remember that the ocean reflects also the sky. Bear that in mind! reflects also the sky. What a yearning! With what melancholy must the ocean look into eternity! must it not? What a yearning! The land it cannot move, the sky it cannot reach.

LYDIA.

[*In a low tone.*] No.

LONGFRID.

But that is just music, dearest! Music which is round life, as the ocean is round the land. A something issuing from it . . . and seeking adventures . . . a sequence, so to speak . . . that which cannot be held fast, cannot be overtaken, but which also can never rest.

LYDIA.

[*In a low tone.*] The Undine.

LONGFRID.

The Undine, stretching out her hands towards heaven for more. She reflects the heaven, but has

it not. Therefore away, away from everything stable and unattainable. She both entices and flies, does she not? She both covets and yields.

LYDIA, *who has half-risen, trembles, and tries to draw him nearer.*

LONGFRID.

[*Rising.*] Always on the boundary. Between the known and the unknown, further than itself knows, goes music. When all has been expressed, music has more to say. But it ends in something itself cannot express.

LYDIA.

[*Who has also risen.*] Longfrid! Longfrid!

LONGFRID.

It explains and asks riddles. With its eyes full of heaven it returns into itself sobbing. Oh! there are moments so dreadful that I could throw myself back, I also, like the wave which is broken into foam. For I do not attain . . . I do not attain.

[LYDIA presses to his side.

LONGFRID.

[*Recovering himself.*] Nay, do not weep. This has to do with me, not with you.

LYDIA.

With us both.

LONGFRID.

Do not weep. I only wanted you to understand that it is no small thing when I call you Undine.

LYDIA.

Forgive me. I have this fear. Take it from me ! Take me to you. Let me be with you ! Hide me with you.

LONGFRID.

I will never let you go.

LYDIA.

[*Passionately.*] O Longfrid ! That name ! You received it for my sake. It means long peace. You shall give me long peace. [She clings to him.

LONGFRID.

[*Looking tenderly into her eyes.*] Don't you think I understand ?

LYDIA.

Even when I was sixteen, or indeed before, long before, when I sat upon the platform and played, . . .

I used to think: If only some one would come and carry me off to a shady place! where no one might see me and I see no one! Those were my thoughts while I sat and played. But no one came.

LONGFRID.

Lydia! . . .

LYDIA.

Many came, but not the one who can carry me away. Not you!

LONGFRID.

Undine, how bored you were, weren't you?

LYDIA.

Oh! . . .

LONGFRID.

And played tricks, didn't you? simply because you were bored; didn't you?

LYDIA.

[*Breaking from him.*] What do you know? What have you heard?

LONGFRID.

Nothing at all. I guessed it. One cannot play as you do, without having had . . .

LYDIA.

Having had yearnings, Longfrid.

LONGFRID.

More than yearnings! weren't they? When I first heard you play, I thought in myself, . . . do you know what I thought? [LYDIA does not answer. "She has been deep down." Those powerful chords that go to the inmost heart have not been learnt without a price. She has been down in the under-currents, down near the bottom. Those are cries wrung from the heart.

LYDIA.

Oh! . . .

LONGFRID.

She has fought her way out again. What strength!

LYDIA.

It was given me when I saw you.

LONGFRID.

No, you did not see me.

LYDIA.

I saw you directly you entered. Do you think I can be mistaken in that?

LONGFRID.

You did not see me, assuredly ! You did not even look up. I was standing waiting for you to do so.

LYDIA.

Then I felt you were there ! When I am playing I feel everything.

LONGFRID.

That may be.

LYDIA.

O Longfrid ! My dream came true, after all. I was sitting playing ; and then you came ! Came and took me and bore me to a shady place. [*Clings to him.*] Now I understand why it could not happen before. You are younger than I, and this also often arouses my fears.

LONGFRID.

Of us two you are the younger, the stronger, the more impulsive. [*LYDIA throws her arms round his neck with a cry.*] Are you not ?

LYDIA.

[*In a low tone.*] It is love that does it, Longfrid.

LONGFRID.

Is that what it does ?

LYDIA.

Yes, love makes one greater. There is nothing else we desire when we love than to grow greater ourselves.

LONGFRID.

How wise you are to-day !

LYDIA.

You could not love any one who did not give you music. More music.

LONGFRID.

No.

LYDIA.

Don't you see ? She must be music, the one you love.

LONGFRID.

She must. . . . But she can be so, without herself playing.

LYDIA.

She cannot be music without that, Longfrid !

LONGFRID.

She can.

LYDIA.

Do you think so?

LONGFRID.

I know it.

LYDIA.

Have you met some one, who . . . ?

LONGFRID.

Oh yes, several.

LYDIA.

Who gave you music? Without knowing music?

LONGFRID.

Certainly! . . . Come! Suppose you were in the
humour now. . . .

LYDIA.

To play?

LONGFRID.

Yes! Do play a little!

LYDIA.

Just now, when you tell me it is nothing to know how to play.

LONGFRID.

I did not say that. But is it not possible to speak of something else than ourselves ?

LYDIA.

Certainly.

LONGFRID.

Excuse me. But something torments me that I was not able to tell you yesterday. I did not want it to trouble us as it was the first time.

LYDIA.

[Anxiously.] What is it ? What do you mean ?

LONGFRID.

I have not worked. I cannot work any longer.

LYDIA.

[In dread.] You cannot work ?

LONGFRID.

No ; I cannot.

LYDIA.

You? Who are richer than all the others together.

LONGFRID.

[*Passionately.*] Do not say that to me. Pardon me. . . . The last time we were together, I had so many ideas. . . . It is true. I have never been richer; but I have not been able to make anything out of them. I found no rest for the work I wanted.

LYDIA.

You went away to get rest.

LONGFRID.

Yes, but I did not get it. I cannot work any longer! Perhaps the subject is partly to blame. It has ceased to be true for me. And then it is so monotonous; nothing but this yearning, this eternal yearning.

LYDIA.

. . . After a soul, Longfrid, after a higher life.

LONGFRID.

Yes, but is always the same endless straining as in Wagner. And that does not suit me.

LYDIA.

No one can vary a theme like you.

LONGFRID.

[*In despair.*] Don't tell me that. You shall hear the whole truth. When I am away from you it is one constant yearning after you. And when I am with you. . . .

LYDIA.

[*Quickly interrupting him.*] Let us go to the piano.

LONGFRID.

Yes, let us . . . ! If only I dare now.

LYDIA.

Dare . . . ! That was what you wished.

LONGFRID.

I will tell you something. [*Puts his hand into his pocket.*] I have brought something with me.

LYDIA.

[*Hastening to the piano.*] And you did not say so directly?

LONGFRID.

I don't feel sure of myself. It certainly is not . . .

LYDIA.

[*Who has opened the piano.*] Come now. [*She strikes some chords from the chief motive of the Undine.*] Do you remember?

LONGFRID.

[*Interrupting her resolutely.*] . . . No, I will not. It does not come up to that.

[*He pushes the manuscript deeper into his pocket.*

LYDIA.

[*Rises and goes to him, and says softly.*] Longfrid !

LONGFRID.

You do not know how I have suffered.

LYDIA.

And you did not write to me ! If you had, I should have come.

LONGFRID.

I would not confess it to myself. How could I ?

LYDIA.

I thank you for wanting to come to me. You shall not be disappointed. I will create a deep, vast silence around you, as if you were living in a forest, a large forest

LONGFRID.

How?

LYDIA.

In art the essential thing is to be alone, far away from all surroundings.

LONGFRID

Naturally.

LYDIA.

Last time this was not possible. All the time was lost in trying to find out how to be alone. That caused the unrest. Don't you understand?

LONGFRID.

Perhaps . . . Yes, do you know . . .

LYDIA.

Let us go away, Longfrid. There is no other means. You and I—I and you, and stillness, stillness. No one and nothing else besides. Then you shall see.

LONGFRID.

Yes, if only we could ! I am so far down,

LYDIA.

Let us go away, Longfrid ! Oh ! . . . Oh ! go with me into the town, now at once, Longfrid.

LONGFRID.

Into the town ?

LYDIA.

I will only just run and dress, and then we will go into the town and get everything ready.

LONGFRID.

What has the town to do with it ?

LYDIA.

I must have something to travel in.

LONGFRID.

Have you not clothes enough ?

LYDIA.

For travelling ? No.

LONGFRID.

[*Laughs.*] And yet we are going away to be alone.

LYDIA.

Oh ! you understand nothing about wardrobes.

LONGFRID.

Oh yes, I do ! Many trunks ! Large, unmanageable horrors ! Perfect nuisances !

LYDIA.

But there is something in every trunk that can become art, like these heaps of music. Tell me, what does an artist know ?

LONGFRID.

A painter ? Generally, not much.

LYDIA.

In his art, I mean ?

LONGFRID.

Oh ! I suppose something about drawing and colour.

LYDIA.

And a sculptor?

LONGFRID.

Something about lines and forms.

LYDIA.

And a musician?

LONGFRID.

What should he?

LYDIA.

[Interrupting him.] And a musician?

LONGFRID.

Well, . . . something about sounds and . . .

LYDIA.

A wardrobe is all that in one! A part of ourselves, that is, when we are wearing it. And we ourselves? We ourselves . . .

LONGFRID.

[Kissing her.] . . . Are charming! . . . I will go with you! [They stand in the background to the right.]

LYDIA.

Now you are more lover-like.

LONGFRID.

Do you think so?

LYDIA.

Yes. But not so much as you ought to be. Dearest, to love one like you makes one afraid. Can you deny it?

LONGFRID.

Yes.

LYDIA.

I will not flatter you by explaining it to you.

LONGFRID.

Good-bye, then. [He goes to the door at the back.]

LYDIA.

[Calling after him in a low tone.] You must not tell your uncle.

LONGFRID.

[Turns round, laughing.] Of course, there must be something about uncle at the end!

LYDIA.

[Who is now at the door on the right.] Are you going that way?

LONGFRID.

Is there any other?

[LYDIA glides out on the right. LONGFRID follows her.

CURTAIN.

THIRD ACT.

A smaller room in the same hotel. Door at back. To the right, a bed with a screen in front. Before the screen a large open trunk. A hat-box. On a chair a plaid; standing on this a portmanteau with a hat upon the top. Farther off, a stool supporting a music-chest. Some music is strewn about the floor beside it. Near the chest stands LONGFRID KANN arranging the music. Some he throws aside, and some he places carefully in the chest. By the opposite wall, to the left, are a toilet-table and a wardrobe, nearer to the front of the stage, a door. In the middle of the room, a centre-table and chairs.

FIRST SCENE.

[*A knock is heard at the door on the left.*

LONGFRID.

Come in.

DR. KANN.

[*Entering with a small box in his hand.*] Ah! you are just packing.

LONGFRID.

[*Eagerly.*] It is some music that has remained here since last time. Now and again it has to be arranged. [*He continues his work.*]

DR. KANN.

[*Who has walked up to the large trunk, crosses over to the wardrobe, which is ajar, and looks into it.*] You have emptied the wardrobe too?

LONGFRID.

I only arrived last night, and I have not yet unpacked.

DR. KANN.

Here is something I have brought for you. [*Longfrid turns towards him.*] You know that we could not find your father's seal.

LONGFRID.

[*Joyfully.*] Have you found it?

DR. KANN.

It had been broken, and your father had just sent it away to be mended when he fell ill. The engraver, however, mislaid the address, and as no one came to fetch it, he did not know to whom it belonged. Then, he happened to receive an order from me . . . and saw the same seal. In this way it was recovered. Here it is.

LONGFRID.

Thank you so much. You could not bring anything more precious to me. [*He takes it out of the box, and reads.*] “LABOREMUS.” There it is.

DR. KANN.

In our seal.

LONGFRID.

In our blood too, I hope.

DR. KANN.

I am not here alone, you know. I have a young lady with me.

LONGFRID.

The one you went to London to fetch? An American, is she not?

DR. KANN.

No. She has lived in America ; but she is a Norwegian.

LONGFRID.

And speaks Norwegian ?

DR. KANN.

Certainly. She is quite young ; only seventeen.

LONGFRID.

Yes. What about her ? I have so little time.

DR. KANN.

Ah, you have very little time ?

LONGFRID.

I don't quite mean that. What is it about her ?

DR. KANN.

I happened to tell her the story of your Undine. You don't mind my having done so ?

LONGFRID.

No !

DR. KANN.

Do you know what she said ?

LONGFRID.

Well . . . ?

DR. KANN.

“ It seems rather monotonous to me.”

LONGFRID.

This seventeen-years old girl ! Why, she is right !
Is she clever ?

DR. KANN.

Quite an original. “ I know what an Undine is,”
she said ; “ I could tell him about one.”

LONGFRID.

She . . . ? She means, perhaps, from a fairy-tale.

DR. KANN.

No, a real occurrence. “ It might turn his whole
plot upside down,” she said.

LONGFRID.

Come, come ! I suppose you have heard it. Can’t you tell me ?

DR. KANN.

Should you not prefer to hear it from her ?

LONGFRID.

Yes. Can I?

DR. KANN.

Certainly.

LONGFRID.

But when? Now, at once?

DR. KANN.

Why not? Cannot she come in here?

LONGFRID.

Will that suit?

DR. KANN.

Do you think she is afraid? An American girl
and a Norwegian in one!

LONGFRID.

Perhaps it must be I who am afraid.

DR. KANN.

[*As he turns to go.*] That is more likely. She is
here. [*He goes to the door.*]

[*LONGFRID tries hastily to put things a little in
order. Outside the door, DR. KANN is
heard saying,*]

“Never mind, come in.”

[A moment later, BORGNY enters in a black dress with lace collar and cuffs, and her hair arranged as in the portrait of the beginning of the second act.

DR. KANN.

[Following her.] May I introduce my nephew to you, Miss Auclaire,—Longfrid Kann?

LONGFRID.

You are looking for something, Miss Auclaire?

BORGNY.

I thought there was a piano here.

LONGFRID.

Do you play?

BORGNY.

Nothing to speak of. But I thought you played.

LONGFRID.

I am only making a short stay here, being on my travels.

BORGNY.

You intend to go away again, then?

LONGFRID.

Yes ; . . . but not immediately.

BORGNY.

I had been looking forward so much to hear a composer play.

[*A knock is heard at the door on the left.*

LONGFRID.

[*Annoyed.*] Who is there now, I wonder ?

DR. KANN.

It must be some one for me, I think. You allow me ?

[*He goes to the door, and opens it. A servant presents him with a visiting-card on a tray.*
DR. KANN looks at the card.

SERVANT.

Cette personne dit que Monsieur l'attend.

DR. KANN.

En effet ! Excuse me !

[*Exit, with the servant following.*

LONGFRID.

Won't you take a seat, Miss Auclaire ?

BORGNY.

Thank you.

[They sit down at the table opposite each other.

LONGFRID.

You wanted to tell me something ?

BORGNY.

Can I begin ?

LONGFRID.

Do, please.

BORGNY.

I wanted to tell you something that happened in my own family.

A lady, one of the noblest women that ever lived, fell very ill. She sat in an easy-chair or lay in bed, and was no longer able to do anything. She could not even play, which she liked best of all ; nor was it possible for her to have her daughter with her.

LONGFRID.

Why could she not have her daughter with her ?

BORGNY.

The disease was contagious.

LONGFRID.**Ah !****BORGNY.**

This longing for music and for her daughter rendered her condition worse. The doctors came to the conclusion that she ought, at least, to hear some music. The family lived in the country, but was very rich. So they advertised through a musical agency for an accomplished lady-pianist.

LONGFRID.**But the disease was contagious !****BORGNY.**

That was why it was so long before any one could be found. At last, however, there was one who ventured.

LONGFRID.**A skilful one ?****BORGNY.****An extraordinary one. A renowned one, even.****LONGFRID.**

This interests me ! Music as a cure ! . . . And what was the result ?

BORGNY.

Excellent. She enchanted every one. There was something in her person and in her music, something that hypnotised.

The patient revived ; her appetite increased ; sleep came ; her vital power was quickened, so that the doctors began to have fresh hopes. Far and wide, people spoke of it. The music had really worked wonders.

LONGFRID.

That music has a healing power, who can doubt ?

BORGNY.

Besides the patient, there was another listener, a shy man, in a corner.

LONGFRID.

The husband of the patient.

BORGNY.

[*Nodding affirmatively.*] They had lived out there on the estate, very much alone, these two. He preferred it so, and she, though lively and bright by nature, yielded to his wishes.

LONGFRID.

He was peculiar.

BORGNY.

A man of passive temperament, living much in his own thoughts and with Nature. In addition to this he was fond of music, and was delighted with the playing, the more so as his wife improved in health. He admired the accomplished pianist. His gratitude knew no bounds. This she noticed and took advantage of.

LONGFRID.

To beguile him ?

BORGNY.

She was very cunning, and he had no experience, so that he was easily caught.

LONGFRID.

What do you say ?

BORGNY.

She no longer tried to cure his wife. She wanted her out of the way ; she wanted to take her place.

LONGFRID.

But the patient ?

BORGNY.

Understood everything. Oh, immediately ! She was a spiritual, sensitive nature.

LONGFRID.

And said nothing ?

BORGNY.

I should not have done so either ; and soon she was no longer able to say anything.

LONGFRID.

How so ?

BORGNY.

The other one took away her strength, inch by inch, with her wishes, with her eyes, with her music. She even turned the music against her.

LONGFRID.

[*Rising.*] Such a thing I never . . .

BORGNY.

The poor patient had great confidence in one of the doctors she had known for a long time. But he had been away, and when he came back she could

no longer speak. She wrote, at broken intervals, a few lines ; and then begged to die.

LONGFRID.

[*Softly.*] And died ? [BORGNY *nods affirmatively.*] Think of it ! To be so heartless ! To use music in that way ! [*Paces up and down.*] You ought not to have told me this. I am one of those that can never get rid of an impression of this kind.

BORGNY.

[*Rising quietly.*] Neither ought you. [LONGFRID *stands still.*] For here you have the Undine !

LONGFRID.

This . . . the Undine ?

BORGNY.

So dark, so passionate. She has the colour of her element.

LONGFRID.

She has it also in my opera ; have no doubt about that. . . . But so cold !

BORGNY.

The wave *is* cold.

LONGFRID.

She loves, and aspires to rise.

BORGNY.

Yes. But if something comes between, she slays.

LONGFRID.

[*In a flash of inspiration.*] Of course ! Then he must be married.

BORGNY.

Yes.

LONGFRID.

He whom the Undine loves, must be married ! . . .

The Undine . . . the Undine sees them one morning together on the beach. Just so ! sees them embrace each other. Then she determines to slay ; and at once . . .

BORGNY.

Then she ingratiates herself with her.

LONGFRID.

She draws her. A struggle ! The dark voice and the white voice ! Choirs of spirits ! Those from the ocean, and those from the world above. What colours !

BORGNY.

But then *he* must no longer care for her ?

LONGFRID.

That is granted ! Of course ! The Undine has broken laws of which she was ignorant. She has closed to herself the world she aspired to enter. She knows no better.

BORGNY.

Then she is thrust back into the ocean ?

LONGFRID.

Back into the ocean ! . . . The forms become larger, and the two incongruous elements . . . [To himself.] This I must tell at once.

BORGNY.

Yes, you are working with some one ?

LONGFRID.

No, I am not. I work alone. But I have some one whom I consult. A great lady-pianist. [He pauses at this word.] I will tell it to her. [With a quick transition.] And you are only seventeen.

BORGNY.

No, a little older. I am seventeen and three months.

LONGFRID.

Yes, I could imagine . . . that you were older.

BORGNY.

I should like to say to you one thing more.

LONGFRID.

Why only one ?

BORGNY.

Because I do not know any more. He . . . Yes, he whom the Undine loves must be an enthusiast.

LONGFRID.

Yes, I have it so. An enthusiast of Nature.

BORGNY.

A poet, a musician, for instance.

LONGFRID.

Why ?

BORGNY.

Because such people are more easily caught.

LONGFRID.

And you are only seventeen and three months?

BORGNY.

And five days.

LONGFRID.

Yes, I could imagine so! Seventeen and three months is too little. . . . Have you no more to say?

BORGNY.

Only a wish for you, that where you work there should always be a pure air. . . . Good-bye.

LONGFRID.

A very modest wish.

BORGNY.

You cannot expect more from one who is only seventeen years, three months, and five days old.

[*She bows.*

LONGFRID.

[*At the same time.*] And five days! I should like to know whether a few hours could not be added.

BORGNY.

I will go in and calculate it. When I have done, may I come in again?

LONGFRID.

Of course.

BORGNY.

Then perhaps I could learn at the same time what your lady says about the change. You will tell her the story, shall you not?

LONGFRID.

How can you ask? Then there is nothing more.

BORGNY.

No, thank you. That is enough. [Bows again.

LONGFRID.

I shall see you again.

[Accompanies her to the door, and returns radiant.

SECOND SCENE.

[*There is a knock at the door at the back.*

HOTEL SERVANT.

Madame Wisby fait demander si Monsieur peut l'accompagner en ville pour faire des emplettes.

LONGFRID.

Annoncez-moi à Madame Wisby. Dites que j'ai à lui parler.

HOTEL SERVANT.

Madame Wisby est là.

[*He opens the door wide, which has remained ajar.*

LYDIA.

[*In an elegant walking costume, is seen putting on her gloves.*] What has happened ? Is it Dr. Kann ?

LONGFRID.

[*Closing the door.*] No, no, no ! Something quite different ! Altogether different ! [*Coming back to her.*] It concerns the Undine. She has become

more of an elemental power. The sentimentality is gone! She has grown into something terrible! Greater!

LYDIA.

Another subject?

LONGFRID.

No, the old one, but enlarged. He whom the Undine loves, he who is to raise her, has a wife.

LYDIA.

Must he be married?

LONGFRID.

Wait a moment! A thousand times better. Wait a moment. She sees them together on the beach. . . .

LYDIA.

Him and his wife?

LONGFRID.

Him and his wife. She sees his wife caress him; sees him embrace her; sees them go away together with their arms round each other's waist. You can imagine her rage, can you not?

LYDIA.

But surely this is something . . .

LONGFRID.

No, wait a moment. The important part is only just beginning! An Undine. . . . An Undine is one who determines to conquer at all hazards. An Undine brooks no resistance. A whole army surrounds her. When next the wife comes on the beach, alluring songs are heard on all sides, alluring songs. And in the midst of these waves of sound rises the Undine herself. This great, dark voice! . . . You can hear it, can you not? It announces Nature, announces to the wife, who is ill and weak, health that shall sweep over her from the ocean! "Come!" sings the choir, on all sides, calling, calling her. "Come, you shall be your husband's joy," sings the Undine, "in my embrace, health awaits you."

LYDIA.

And then she kills the wife. . . .

LONGFRID.

That strikes you, does it not? It opens new horizons. She does not know what she is doing. She is an Undine!

Then comes the husband, just as it happens. First his despair, then his horror, his hate. And then the terror of the Undine. She does not understand it. Then the choirs; the great choirs! . . . now they swell! The Undine's choir which fights her battle and seeks to raise her. Then the choir of the moral world! Ah! how they join now! They rush upon her; they thrust her and what is hers, amid thunder and dread, back into the ocean. . . . [*in a low voice*]. It seems to me I have no time to lose.

LYDIA.

How did you come to think of that? . . . You have not read it?

LONGFRID.

No, a story, which was told me just now, suggested it. A true occurrence. Terrible!

LYDIA.

A story? . . .

LONGFRID.

A story of a sick wife who was very musical.

It was thought that perhaps music would cure her. A sublime idea, don't you think so? So a celebrated

lady-pianist was called in . . . a pianist for the sick wife. She was to administer to her daily this healing draught. And she did so with wonderful effect. The strength of the patient increased, increased amid the music, like flowers which are brought out of the cellar and are placed in the warm air.

LYDIA.

That was splendid.

LONGFRID.

Splendid ? You say splendid ? Do you know what she did ?

LYDIA.

The pianist ?

LONGFRID.

She killed her ! Fancy : To be able to heal with music, and then make use of it to kill ! She turned it against her. She took the husband ! She killed the one who lay there helpless, with a thousand secret arts.

LYDIA.

Who . . . who has told you this ? Dr. Kann ?

LONGFRID.

My uncle ? He has not said a single word. Not

one. This is quite a fixed idea of yours about my uncle. Imagine now the orchestration around this new white voice ; the mighty cry for help ; the white lament of innocence ! And then the chill coldness of Nature into which it sinks. . . . Then the dark voice.

LYDIA.

But it cannot possibly have happened like that.

LONGFRID.

What do you mean ? Of what are you speaking ?

LYDIA.

Of her, her who is supposed to have been killed ?

LONGFRID.

The patient ? Why do you think of her ? How should it have happened ?

LYDIA.

How do I know ? Who can know it indeed ? Don't you understand, some one has deceived you ?

LONGFRID.

No ; who could have any interest in doing so ?

LYDIA.

This anæmic woman whom they want to thrust into your Opera ! What has she to do with it ? In the world of elemental powers ? She, the sick woman ! You talk of painting "white." It must be a sallow white ; like the moon—like the moon !

LONGFRID.

Do you take sides against the sick woman ?

LYDIA.

When a man stands between ! On the one hand, a woman who can neither live nor die. On the other, a strong, healthy woman ! Would you have me side with the sick one ?

LONGFRID.

But, Lydia ! . . .

LYDIA.

Would you force me to it ? To pity the one who could not be his wife, and probably had not been for many years ?

LONGFRID.

How do you know ?

LYDIA.

It was you who said so.

LONGFRID.

I ?

LYDIA.

Or else I felt it, while you were speaking. It is self-evident.

LONGFRID.

You forgot one thing. She, this other one, the pianist had come to cure; to cure the poor patient with her music.

LYDIA.

And while she was doing this, the husband coveted her. That is easy to understand, I think.

LONGFRID.

[*Is seen to master himself with difficulty; at last he says*] But when she noticed it.

LYDIA.

Ah! What then? I don't know what happened, but I suppose she took what was her right.

LONGFRID.

Her right? The right of the animal, do you mean?

LYDIA.

Cannot we speak of something that concerns neither
me nor you . . . speak of it . . . ?

LONGFRID.

Speak of it calmly? If you can do so, I beg you
will. [A pause.]

LYDIA.

You only love the happy ones, Longfrid; those
who possess their full strength, so that they fit in
everywhere.

LONGFRID.

Indeed . . . ah! How is it, then, that the Undine
became my first love? Was it because she possessed
her full strength?

LYDIA.

No, . . . one can't exactly say that.

LONGFRID.

I do not think so either. . . . It was not, however,
of that, but of the Opera, we were going to speak . . .
You are against the change.

LYDIA.

Against it? That is saying too little. I hate it
. . . This sentimental trash!

LONGFRID.

Sentimental? This?

LYDIA.

It becomes a struggle between love and morals; as
if we had not had enough of that!

LONGFRID.

. . . I am no philosopher.

LYDIA.

. . . Nor I either! . . .

LONGFRID.

. . . But I understand this much, that here the
Undine encounters and comes into opposition with
what man has gained. If she could understand that,
she would have a soul, she also.

LYDIA.

Understand? What?

LONGFRID.

That the life of man follows higher laws !
She breaks them, and is driven back. Can you not
hear the surging myriads of the ocean around her ?
How blindly they rush on !

Defiant ? And the answers from the choruses
above, like beams of light, victorious thrusts of lances,
and then the thunder !

LYDIA.

It is too great for me. What I understood was
her longing. Her pain in the life she led. Her
craving for what she could not reach. Her aspiration
after a higher form of life. Her belief that she could
reach it by winning the soul of a man, and then by
having a share in life through him.

[*She betrays her emotion.*

LONGFRID.

This is already in it. And will remain, all !

LYDIA.

To be betrayed ! To be thrust back into that from
which she wished to escape !

LONGFRID.

Because she tried to attain her end through a crime ! She has broken the laws of the higher world-order into which she wishes to enter. That will not do ! This is the new element which is added.

LYDIA.

A crime . . . ? I see no crime in the Undine.

The story of the Undine is the great Nature-yearning ; the great love for what is above her, for that which delivers, whatever be the obstacles.

LONGFRID.

Heaven mirrored in the ocean. A dream delivers no one.

LYDIA.

Yes, if it meets with something as great. . .

A love so great that it can raise the greatest sinner . . . that he takes her in his arms and whispers : " I will cleanse you."

My eyes alone shall do it ; so full for you are they of good.

In my breast is a draught for you. All that until to-day has given you pain shall disappear. Nothing, nothing shall be able to resist my hands when they

reach out towards you. I will bear you up to the angels. I love you so much that I am able to do it. Yes, if needs be, if we can rise in no other way, I will die with you the redeeming death, die with you in my arms. Then we shall be allowed to enter.

LONGFRID.

I have read that somewhere too.

LYDIA.

This is the great love. This is what I wanted you to compose. It was in this love we met [*despairingly*]. Why, then, not hold fast to it, Longfrid?

LONGFRID.

Because the story for me is shattered to pieces . . . into a hundred thousand pieces !

LYDIA.

Why ?

LONGFRID.

This restless surface of the ocean ; this blind power of Nature, the Undine, who wants to get into heaven . . . when one comes to handle it in earnest, the subject is impossible.

For everything is against it, everything that man has attained, everything he feels and knows to-day.

LYDIA.

[*Painfully.*] You cannot . . . ?

LONGFRID.

No one can ! The gulf is too wide. It is not a metamorphosis, no ; a hundred thousand, even millions of years would be needed for such a one to reach heaven ! No strike of the bow can do it ! No modern imagination can entertain it.

LYDIA.

[*Faintly.*] You give the Undine up, then . . . ?

LONGFRID.

It was not the Undine ! No, she who heartlessly kills in order to reach her goal, that is the Undine ; it is that which creates the chasm.

LYDIA.

[*As before.*] Then you will not ? You will not ?

LONGFRID.

Take life ! All poetry is only a widening or a compressing of life. We know nothing else.

LYDIA.

[*Angrily.*] As if in life there were not thousands who have committed worse things in order to raise themselves, Longfrid !

LONGFRID.

But they do not rise !

LYDIA.

Do you dare to tell me that ?

LONGFRID.

Not to heaven ! Not to that which heaven represents to us ! Just think !

LYDIA.

But does that hysterical skeleton, who stretches out her bony arms towards the living life, belong to heaven ? She who exhales her poisonous breath into one's being ? And will not let go ? This consumptive bust ? Should she reach heaven ? Shall the strength of life, the power of nature, be driven back by her ? Life by death ? I hate her ! God knows, I could hate you too, when you drift into such by-paths and daub yourself with such sentimentality ! It is a betrayal. Do not look at me like that ! I could

... I could... [LONGFRID remains quiet.] You are thinking, perhaps: "Is it you?"

LONGFRID.

[*In a low voice.*] Yes.

LYDIA.

No, it is not I, Longfrid! It is only my despair! Can you not understand it? You must have understood from my senseless talk how dear my dream had become to me!

And understood what it might have become if we two had worked together; no, if I only might share in it! Forgive me what I have said. It is only that I want to hold fast, to hold fast to the idea of the Undine's great love being from eternity and begetting eternity.

Why should she be deceived in her belief, Longfrid? You must save her, Longfrid, a little, too, for my sake.

LONGFRID.

Shall we speak about it?

LYDIA.

Yes.

LONGFRID.

For that was not speaking about it, was it ?

LYDIA.

No, pardon me !

LONGFRID.

Then, let us sit down !

LYDIA.

Yes.

[She attempts to sit down.]

LONGFRID.

[Pointing.] There, rather !

LYDIA.

As you will !

[She sits down in the chair he occupied when talking to BORGNY. LONGFRID takes BORGNY's chair.]

LONGFRID.

I see everything at present so clearly. Now you shall hear. It is peace from all her longing that the Undine seeks, is it not ?

LYDIA.

Yes, yes.

LONGFRID.

But it is evident, if she robs him of his peace, that he henceforth has none to give.

LYDIA.

But love!

LONGFRID.

Ah! it is just the same! He cannot take her into his arms if she has chilled his heart.

LYDIA.

Is she cold?

LONGFRID.

I mean the warmth which has gradually come into the life of man. This she has not. She is outside of it. They belong to two different worlds. Thousands of years lie between them.

LYDIA.

Does she not feel as he does? Or what do you mean?

LONGFRID.

She cannot feel as he does.

LYDIA.

If not in everything . . . what does it matter ?

LONGFRID.

Think of a man who has a given task, and then some one at his side who hinders him.

LYDIA.

Why should she hinder him ?

LONGFRID.

Imagination is the leader that is yoked to the team. It is in our imagination that all is initiated, long before we begin in earnest to examine, to co-ordinate, and to shape. But in imagination . . . where the leader is . . . this is essential ! . . . there, there is wanted. . . .

LYDIA.

[*With anxious eagerness.*] What . . . what is wanted there ?

LONGFRID.

There, nothing must hinder, nothing lead astray ; there, pure air is wanted . . . pure air must be round about.

LYDIA.

We were speaking of feeling.

LONGFRID.

[As before.] There must be peace ; and there will be no peace, if they both feel differently *[rising]*. The wrathful choir of spirits from above, that is the greatest thing I can create.

LYDIA.

[Also rising.] That . . . that is the greatest ! To modernise with petty psychological chipping an antique subject, a venerable marble colossus which has been recovered from the river-bed, where it has been worn by sand and water for thousands of years ! You will never become great by giving yourself up to these things !

LONGFRID.

And still less, if I am untrue to my feelings.

LYDIA.

[In a passion of anger.] This Christian . . . ! Is there some one there ? Is there some one listening at the door ?

[She goes quickly to the left, then recoils with a heartrending cry.]

[BORGNY enters.]

LYDIA.

It is she again. [Walks up to her.] Who are you ? .

BORGNY.

My mother's daughter.

LONGFRID.

What . . . ?

[LYDIA, losing all her strength, turns away, and goes slowly out. Once again she turns in the door-way and looks at LONGFRID, then disappears.

DR. KANN.

[Who has just come in and laid his hand on LONGFRID's shoulder.] Let this be a thing of the past !

LONGFRID.

But that cry, uncle ? that heartrending cry ?

DR. KANN.

Will pursue you yet for a long time, until it becomes music.

[LONGFRID, labouring under strong inward emotion, tries to answer, but sees BORGNY, and is silent.

BORGNY.

[*Embarrassed.*] Can I go to father now ?

DR. KANN.

Do so ! I will stay here.

[*When BORGNY has gone, LONGFRID throws himself on his uncle's breast.*

DR. KANN.

Now you will be able to work.

LONGFRID.

Now . . . ? Oh, not for a long time !

DR. KANN.

No, no. But all the better when you do.

CURTAIN.

67

